Wars, Fire, Politics

Glebe Has Withstood Despite Troubled Times

By ERIC R. HERST

Despite changing historical fortunes, the Glebe Episcopal Church in Driver still owns some 301 acres of farm land, or glebe, donated by such colonial settlers as Percival Champion in 1640 and Richard Bennett in 1676.

Considering the actions of the Rev. John Agnew in the spring of 1775 and the pervasive anti-Anglican feelings in America after the Revolutionary War, the continual ownership of the land by the church is a remarkable achievement claims Rector H.M. Kennickell.

The present church was ordered built in 1737 by the vestry on land donated by Richard Bennett in 1676. The church replaced one originally constructed in 1642 to serve what was then known as the Lower Parish.

By 1725, however, the Lower and Chuckatuck Parishes were united to form the present day Suffolk Parish.

Master of Ill-Timing

Cited as a master of ill-timing by some and an example of outspokeness by others (depending on whether you sympathized with the American or British cause), the Rev. Agnew was a zealous supporter of the Crown.

Not one to make himself popular, the Rev. Agnew was open in his condemnations of those seeking independence, according to historical records.

For both the parish and the Rev. Agnew, matters came to a confrontation in the spring of 1775 when he delivered a sermon titled "Render Unto Ceasar the Things That Are Ceasar's."

During the sermon, the Rev. Agnew proceeded to denounce the sins of disloyalty and rebellion.

While delivering the sermon, William Cowper, a vestryman ordered the Rev. Agnew to leave.

Parson Agnew never again entered the church and even joined the British forces as a chaplain.

After the war, all Anglican churches were disenfranchised and by 1802 were required to sell their glebe lands. The proceeds were to be turned over to the poor.

Maintained Control

It was through the efforts of the Rev. Jacob Keeling, however, that the church managed to maintain control of its glebe.

The Rev. Keeling argued successfully through the courts in 1817 that the glebe land was not original Crown property but from private donations.

By 1812 the church was nearly reduced to ruins as the result of continual neglect.

In 1856 the ruined north wing of the church was torn down and the smaller church was repaired.

By the 1900's, when the church was again being used for services, the entrance was changed to the east side by enlarging the original chancel window.

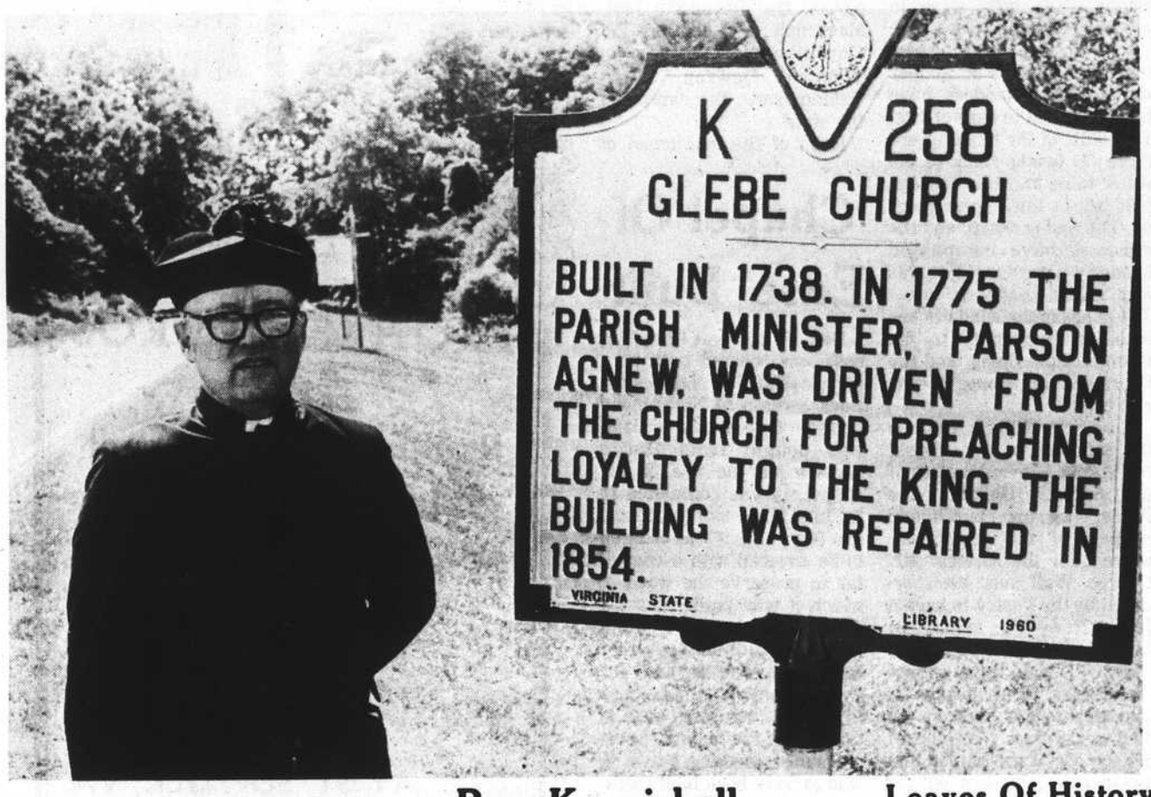
The altar was placed in the west end of the church.

In addition to the land, the church has managed to keep remnants of the silver donated to the church by John Yeates in 1731.

The silver, during the later part of the 19th Century, was kept at the house of Richard H. Beamon. The house was destroyed by fire on October 19, 1895 and the silver was severely damaged.

The remnants, consisting of a flagon, chalice and placy are currently in the custody of the Rev. Kennickell.

The Glebe Church



Rev. Kennickell

Leaves Of History

March 25, 1754. - An Almshouse was built in the town of Suffolk, and there was to be a public free school to be run in the town at the same time. Neither one did well, and were finally abandoned.

Leaves Of History

1759 –The church in the Lower Parish was ordered repaired by an addition to a piece of 25 feet by 23 feet wide.

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Ox Roast On The Nansemond River

It might be comforting to us here in the Suffolk area these July days to read the following passage from the diary of the late Col. John C. Cohoon, in which he tells of some cooler days here many years ago:

"Jan'y 18th, 1857. Snow fell during the past night and all day, and on this day it is now in some places on my farm in drifts eight feet deep. Roads blocked up and impassable. Our river frozen over and answering for a road for foot passengers to and from Suffolk and elsewhere, and on the 27th day of Jany. Instant my sons with some friends had an oyster roast on the ice in sight of my farm on the center of the river, the ice ten inches thick. My groceries is now on board of Capt. C. Thompson's vessel frozen up in the river opposite my farm and has been for weeks and likely to be several days or weeks longer before I get them.

"Such a continuation of extreme cold weather has not been known since the winter of 1780 when an ox was roasted on the ice near the mouth of the river and people went down from Suffolk and returned on skates on the ice to see the sight and partake of the ox they roasted.

"Our river yet frozen over 4th of Feb'y, 1857.
"JOHN C. COHOON."

Col. Cohoon was the son of Gen. John C. Cohoon, and the ancestor of Willis and Paul Cohoon and all others Cohoons of this section.

Leaves Of History

April 25, 1695 - John Cole was granted a large tract of land in the Dismal Swamp.

March 23, 1775 - Patrick Henry made his famous speech in St. John's Church at Richmond.

1788. -- On June 25th Virginia adopted the U.S. Constitution.

Fire-Damaged Silver

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Leaves Of History

Nansemond In The 1720's

1722-23.-- Virginia was divided into customs districts, and in this division Nansemond County fell into the lower district of James River. No licensed lawyers were allowed, each man had to plead his own case in court. There were 30 Indian bowmen of the Nansemonds on the Meherrin River, and 30 on the Nansemond River. At that date there was no town of any consequence in Virginia. An Episcopal clergyman's salary was equal to the labor of 12 negro men. There were 29 counties in the state. The Nansemond parishes were Upper, Lower and Chuckatuck. The militia took in all men from 16 to 60 years old, and each county's militia had to be mustered together once each year, in addition to this the militia had to be mustered in companies or troops four times or more each year. The men were expert marksmen, owing to their using their guns so much in the hunts. The state militia numbered about 18,000. Cavalry had 30 to 60 men to the troop, infantry 50 to 60 men to the company, and no one had to travel over ten miles to attend muster. There were no poor houses in the counties, the paupers being boarded at the planters' houses by the county authorities. There was a debtors prison at Williamsburg. Nansemond had 1,466 tithables in 1723.

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